

## **Together in Community Spirit**

Winnetka's community spirit shines when we come together. Perhaps now, in this festive season, it is worthwhile to take a look back to see just how we started some of our favorite holiday traditions.

### **Fourth of July**

The oldest tradition in our Village is the Fourth of July festivities on the Village Green. Back in 1886, Reverend Dowd inspired the organization of a celebration to bring the community together for wholesome family fun. This "sane fourth" was intended to divert revelers from shooting firearms and public drunkenness!

An early feature was the patriotic pageant depicting the founding of the United States and signing of the Declaration of Independence. Much like today's event, children carried flags and ran races to the cheering of the crowd.

Neighbors greeted each other in what was then a rather unique community gathering for Winnetka. Each family brought a large picnic and spent the full day. In time, the village organized regular monthly "town meetings" that included presentations, performances and other activities to entertain and enhance villagers' lives.

### **Honoring our heroes**

A grateful nation honors the service and sacrifices of its veterans. And so does Winnetka. Two national holidays were established to honor those who have served in our military (Veterans Day) and those who lost their lives while defending this nation and our allies (Memorial Day).

The first Memorial Day celebration in Winnetka took place in 1914 on the Village Green almost fifty years after the Civil War's end but just 15 years after the Spanish war. Heroes of these wars were honored with patriotic music, speeches and a reading of Lincoln's Gettysburgh address.

Memorial Day had originated as Decoration Day, a day to decorate the graves of Union soldiers who had died in the Civil War. By 1914, the holiday had expanded to honor Confederate soldiers and, thus it was declared, "we, the children of a reunited country, place these flowers beneath the Flag and pledge to it our love, loyalty and allegiance, forever."

A similar evolution occurred with what we celebrate today as Veterans Day. It began on November 11, 1919, as Armistice Day to mark the formal end of WWI hostilities on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. After WWII, ceremonies began to include honoring all veterans, and in 1954 the change was made official when the holiday was renamed Veterans Day.

### **Season of light**

The holiday tree lighting and carol sing began in 1913, a tradition reflecting our Christian origins. The event was originally held on the Village Green on Christmas Eve.

Herbert Woolhiser, who visited Winnetka in 1916 just prior to being hired as village manager, made special note of his warm impressions of Winnetka as families gathered in the glow of the lighted tree.

In 1925, villagers at the Christmas Eve event were in for a special treat. As the customary carol sing around the tree came to a close – perhaps with the simple, hopeful ‘Silent Night’ – the tolling of the bell in the new Village Hall was heard for the very first time.

Today Winnetka has evolved well beyond these Christian origins to embrace a wide range of faiths. And this year a new tradition of the lighting of the menorah has been added to celebrate this season of light.

The world has changed in many ways. But part of our quality of life is knowing and being known by our neighbors. As you share in conversations with neighbors, help out on community projects and, yes, join in or traditions and celebrations, I hope you will embrace the spirit of Winnetka.

This year, the Village of Winnetka celebrated its founding along with that of the nation with a special Fourth of July “Founders Day” theme and parade float. PHOTO COURTESY RICHARD FESSLER.

